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## BOOK REVIEWS.

THE THEORY OF ABSTRACT ETHICS. By Thomas Whittaker. Cambridge: The University Press; New York: G. P. Putnam's Sons, 1916. Pp. ix, 126. Price, \$1.35.

This is an interesting book, containing much more material than might be expected from its length. Its main purpose is to expound the ethical position set forth in Professor Juvalta's *Old and New Problems of Morality*; and that, in its turn, may be regarded as a restatement of the ethical position of Kant. But Mr. Whittaker's book is, nevertheless, an original contribution to its subject. It contains some general discussions on the relations of ethics to metaphysics and on the relations between the conceptions of law and end, together with a short historical sketch of the development of abstract ethics. The chief contentions, as I understand them, are (1) that the science of ethics is not dependent on metaphysics, (2) that it rests primarily on the conception of what is intrinsically good or valuable, as ultimate end, (3) that there are certain fundamental laws of morality, which are subsidiary to the ultimate end, but which cannot be directly derived from it, (4) that these fundamental laws are those of liberty and justice, (5) that the consideration of the moral law raises certain metaphysical problems, and prompts us to some attempt to solve these problems. Thus, though metaphysical questions are not involved at the beginning of the study of ethics (except in the sense that they have to be cleared out of the way), they are, nevertheless, suggested at the end. On each of these five contentions some short comments may be made.

In urging that a metaphysical basis is not required, Mr. Whittaker associates himself, to a large extent, with Dr. G. E. Moore. It must suffice to state here that the contention depends largely on what is to be understood by metaphysics. If we understand it to mean a theory of the structure of the universe as a whole, it is probably true that our metaphysical conceptions are based on our ethical ones, fully as much as the latter are on the former. But if we understand by metaphysics the discussion of the objective significance of fundamental conceptions, such a theory as that of Dr. Moore is eminently metaphysical. If we do not rest our ethical conceptions on biology or psychology or sociology, it

would seem that we must rest them on something that is taken as fundamental; and it is not easy to see how anything can be accepted as fundamental without metaphysical discussion.

That the fundamental conception on which it rests is that of the intrinsically good or valuable as an end that ought to be pursued, seems clear; but the relations between *good*, *value*, *end*, and *ought* call for more consideration, I think, than has been given to them either by Dr. Moore or by Mr. Whittaker; and I should suppose that such consideration would be metaphysical.

Mr. Whittaker's main contention, however, is that there are certain main laws of morality, subsidiary to the conception of what is intrinsically good, and not directly derivable from that conception. The most obvious of these is the law of justice; and, in emphasizing this as a fundamental law, Mr. Whittaker comes largely into agreement with Butler and Sidgwick, and, in a different way, with Herbert Spencer, as well as several other writers. Most of those who have emphasized this, however, have held that the end is happiness, interpreted as pleasure or as a sum of pleasures. It seems to be true that the law of justice could not be derived from this conception of the end; but, if ultimate good is conceived, as Mr. Whittaker seems to think it ought to be, rather as the realization of the social self, it is not so apparent that a law of justice is not implied in it. Plato, for instance, interprets justice as meaning the assignment to each individual of the place and function for which he is best fitted in the social unity. It might surely be urged that this is implied in the conception of a good social whole.

When Mr. Whittaker proceeds to consider more definitely what the fundamental laws are, he includes liberty as well as justice. And he appears, after all, to derive these laws from the conception of personality as an end to be realised. If so, it is difficult to see how they can be regarded as independent laws. If we deny the fundamental importance of personality, as some Oriental religions would seem to do, the laws of liberty and justice would fall to the ground. Hence also it is doubtful whether these laws could be used, as Mr. Whittaker seeks to use them, as conclusive objections to the Prussian theory of the power of the State as an independent end.

In his closing chapter Mr. Whittaker seeks to establish certain metaphysical views on an ethical basis. His general argument is summed up in the following statement: "The human mind as

it exists is obviously in some sense a product of a larger whole; hence the principles by which it successfully interprets that whole must be in some way prefigured in the reality of the whole." This is a somewhat vague statement; and I am afraid it involves a *petitio principii*. If we knew that our principles successfully interpreted the whole, it would seem that we must already know the whole.

Mr. Whittaker's book is certainly suggestive and instructive. Some of its historical references are particularly valuable. But it seems to me to be lacking in thoroughness. The criticisms that I have ventured to make have reference to its main contentions; but there are also some minor issues on which objections might be raised. Thus, on p. 105, Mr. Whittaker says of the "logical persecutor" that "professedly regarding belief in what he holds for truth as the highest thing in himself, he makes it his aim systematically to repress the beliefs of others." But surely the logical persecutor does not value his beliefs merely as beliefs, but as truth. He attacks the beliefs of others, not because they differ from his, but because he regards them as wrong and pernicious. It is to be feared that Mr. Whittaker will not convert either the persecutor or the Prussian.

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THE PHILOSOPHY OF WANG YANG-MING. Translated from the Chinese by Frederick Goodrich Henke, Ph.D., former Professor of Psychology and Philosophy in the University of Nanking. With an Introduction by Professor James H. Tufts of the University of Chicago. Open Court Publishing Company. Pp. xvii, 512.

In this volume English students of philosophy are introduced for the first time to one of the most influential Chinese thinkers. It is doubtful whether they knew him in even the most indirect way before the appearance of Dr. Henke's presentation of his work, and they are to be congratulated upon their receipt of such a contribution as is rendered in this faithful translation.

The fundamental doctrines of Wang Yang-Ming which have had the greatest influence upon Chinese students for generations since his time are his teachings of the unity of reality and ex-